



Keeping Participants Safe during COVID- The Perspective of SteppingStone's Nurses

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With the surge of COVID infections this summer caused by the Delta variant, the question of how to keep SteppingStone participants safe while providing care is of increased importance. This newsletter addresses that issue from the perspective of SteppingStone's nurses, who oversee the health of our clients.



It is important to understand that all the people SteppingStone serves need ongoing care to address serious health conditions and without it, the likelihood they will become ill is increased. Whether it is monitoring blood sugar, exercising to retain mobility, being engaged to maintain cognitive function or one of many other conditions, they must have care provided multiple times every week.

Given their age and frail health, participants are also at great risk from the COVID virus itself. The challenge confronting the agency is how to minimize clients' risk from COVID while simultaneously providing uninterrupted care. How this is done is outlined below.

"During the pandemic our participants are mostly staying in their home. All of them complain of boredom and many have become more withdrawn. Some have experienced grave illnesses. Families and caregivers are anxious for them to return to receive care at our Center." Urszula Munka, RN-Presentation Center



Providing COVID Information and Health Advice to Participants

One of core tasks of nurses during the pandemic is to provide information to participants about both COVID and specific health concerns. Our multidisciplinary teams address this in multiple ways including by phone, ZOOM calls, with written materials and in-person assessments and conversations.

"I have made myself available to answer any questions or concerns that come to mind when discussing COVID. Many recent questions have come up about the booster dose, when it will be available and if they should take it. My response has been to reassure them that the vaccine has already proven it is effective in reducing hospitalizations, it has allowed for our

facility to reopen and a gradual return to normalcy for our community overall." Jimmy Goh, RN, MSN, Mission Creek Center

"Since COVID began, I have been working with patients to provide them with the latest information on how to keep themselves safe. I always emphasize the importance of hand hygiene, wearing masks, gloves, social distancing and avoidance of crowds. I also stress to them the importance of keeping their immune system strong: following a healthy diet, drinking water, exercise and following all doctor's instructions." Dina Fridman, RN-Presentation Center

Because many clients and care providers have known their Center's nurses for years, they trust them. In addition nurses can and do provide information in preferred languages.



Helping Participants Get Vaccinated

Perhaps the most important thing SteppingStone participants can do to remain safe is to be vaccinated. Since nurses are in ongoing communication with clients, the issue of vaccination has been discussed for months as they slowly became available last winter. Nurses not only provided the essential information of the benefits of vaccination, they also assisted in scheduling the shot itself. Over 95% of SteppingStone participants are fully vaccinated, and questions are now being addressed

regarding booster shots.

"I encouraged everyone to get their COVID vaccine. It is a great safety net, along with all the efforts (social distancing, mask, hand washing, disinfecting) we put into keeping each and every person safe." Wendy Zhou, RN, Mabini Center



Providing Care in-Centers with an Emphasis of Keeping Participants Safe

In July of this year, after a suspension of fifteen months, in-Center care activities resumed at SteppingStone's four adult day health care Centers. Every safety precaution is employed to minimize risk of infection in accordance with health guidelines at the city, state and federal levels.

This means that participants are seen by the clinicians at each Center, they can get therapies with hands-on instruction, use gym equipment and socialize with other clients. However, the number of people that can attend at one time is reduced by 50% to 75% from pre-pandemic levels to maintain social distancing.

"To ensure everyone's safety, we regularly check patients for COVID symptoms. The surfaces are cleaned and disinfected before and after patient visits. The air is frequently and properly ventilated. We ensure and confirm that participants were negative for COVID-19. A few patients were sent to take COVID-19 diagnostic tests based on their symptoms. Everyone at the center wears PPE, washes hands, and observes social distancing conventions." Dina Fridman, RN-Presentation Center

"Participants were evaluated by the interdisciplinary teams prior to their return to assess for mobility, stamina, and updates on medical conditions and medications. Participants are screened prior to entering the facility - checked for active symptoms related to COVID, and have their temperature taken. Facemasks are required at all times except when eating. Hand sanitizers are available at each table and general common area for usage. Increased staffing has helped support providing in-person care at the center and also continuing with remote check-ins to those who have either not been cleared to return or have chosen not to." Jimmy Goh, RN, MSN, Mission Creek Center.

Where it is possible, some Centers are working to increase the number of clients that can attend daily by offering different care shifts. In-Center care has also been limited by difficulties in transportation services to get clients to and from the Center. In all cases, the Centers strive to get as many participants as possible on any given week, prioritizing those in greatest need.

Continuing to Provide Remote Care

To address the health needs of participants on days when they cannot attend a Center, SteppingStone continues to provide care remotely. This hybrid model of providing in-Center and remote care simultaneously is expected to continue at least through the rest of this year. Providing health care by phone, internet, deliveries and doorstep visits, is strengthened when paired with in-Center care, but still challenging. What is essential is continual communication with clients and strong engagement with their caregivers and primary care physicians.

"Building rapport with families, educating participants and families on what type of symptoms to monitor for (ex. how to check for edema), liasoning health concerns to the primary care physician and scheduling telephone/zoom appointments, Zoom has been a wonderful alternative to in-person face-to-face." Wendy Zhou, RN, Mabini Center



SteppingStone's nurses have been on the front line of caring for hundreds of the most vulnerable residents of San Francisco during the long course of the COVID pandemic. We close this newsletter with their perspective on the larger issues.

"Our participants are in very special circumstances during the pandemic, like everyone else. Most are very isolated and have been under great stress. Some have experienced faster than normal deterioration of their health including a few with mental breakdowns. The daily contacts from me and other staff is helpful for them not just for health

purposes, but because it means someone cares. Every time I make a call I know I am doing something meaningful to help them." George Wu, RN-Golden Gate Center

"I feel the pandemic has heightened awareness as to the many ways a virus can affect a community, and henceforth how to go about protecting oneself and thereby extending to their community. I feel the pandemic has brought about a greater appreciation for the services and opportunities the center provides in

connecting participants and friends that would otherwise be alone and isolated. And finally I think the pandemic has fostered a stronger team environment among staff as we have all at various times needed to rely on one another to get through a crisis of some kind that resulted from the experiences of the past year.” Jimmy Goh, RN, MSN-Mission Creek Center.

Photos: **(Top)** Urszula Munka, RN-Presentation Center
(Middle 1) Jimmy Goh, RN, MSN-Mission Creek Center
(Middle 2) Wendy Zhou, RN, Mabini Center
(Middle 3) Dina Fridman, RN-Presentation Center
(Bottom) George Wu, RN-Golden Gate Center

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